SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Sir, the Minister has given a reply stating that no cooperative or private units have been provided assistance by the Andhra Pradesh KVIB during the above mentioned period. May I know from the Minister whether the Government of India has enquired with the Government of Andhra Pradesh as to what are the constraints that are being faced by the State Government in not financing these village industry units?

श्री महावीर प्रसाद: सभापति महोदय, माननीय सदस्य ने जो पूछा है, यदि उनके पास इस प्रकार की कोई सूचना हो, जिसकी मदद के लिए राज्य सरकार से पूछने की अपेक्षा की जाती है, तो मैं अवश्य पूछूँगा।

Admission of China and Japan in SAARC

*229 SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the 13th meet of the Head of States of SAARC countries, held in Dhaka duing second week of November 2005, decided in favour of admitting Afghanistan as member;

(b) if so, the details of the resolution adopted in this regard, including the brief background of its origin;

(c) whether the summit also dwelt upon a proposal of admitting China and Japan in SAARC;

(d) the nature and status of the said proposal, including broad views of the countries favouring/opposing the proposal; and

(e) the details of the genesis of the proposals of inviting China and Japan as Observer members of SAARC?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (e) The decisions in the SAARC Summit are taken by consensus.

The recent SAARC Summit in Dhaka welcomed the request of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for membership and invited Afghanistan to join as a Member, subject to completion of formalities. The Summit also agreed, in principle, that the People's Republic of China and Japan may be associated as Observers. The Summit further decided that the modalities regarding Observer status will be decided at the twenty-seventh meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers in July, 2006.

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Minister, in his reply, has said that the membership is given to Afghanistan to join as a member of SAARC subject to completion of certain formalities. I would like to know from the hon. Minister what are those formalities and whether any timeframe is fixed for completion of those formalities.

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, any State or any country, joining SAARC, will have to declare that they will adhere to all the principles and the Charter of the SAARC. The Secretariat of SAARC will get in touch with them, and, as soon as possible, it will be completed. They will have to join as 8th Member when next SAARC Summit will be held. It is going to be held in India.

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Sir, in the Charter of the SAARC, there are plenty of formalities which are to be fulfilled. So, at the time of consideration for taking them as a Member, how many formalities were fulfilled and how many are yet to be fulfilled? I would also like to know whether, India, who is a partner in rebuilding Afghanistan, is assisting Afghanistan to complete these formalities and become a permanent Member of the SAARC?

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, India has taken a decision to welcome Afghanistan to the SAARC community and it has expressed its wish and the decision in the SAARC Summit. India has been helping Afghanistan in all the ways possible. There are two questions, one is about the SAARC and the other is about Afghanistan-India relationship. As far as Afghanistan's entry into SAARC is concerned, India has welcomed it. Our hon. Prime Minister has already welcomed Afghanistan as soon as the decision was taken. And he said that it was an appropriate recognition for Afghanistan as a regional partner. With regard to the assistance given to Afghanistan, there is a bilateral decision, and it has already been mentioned in this House many times. India has pledged to assist Afghanistan to the tune of more than 515 million dollars; many of the projects are going on; and for all the ongoing projects, India is committed that it will continue to support Afghanistan in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

SHRI DINESH TRIVEDI: Sir, I want to ask a very short and very specific question. Are you having any proposal to have a common currency like the European Union for the SAARC countries and as well free movement of goods and people within the SAARC countries?

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, the hon. Member put this question last time also. On this, I would just like to make the stand of India clear. India has outlined its vision of a South Asia Economic Community on the pattern of the European Union. South Asia is a compact region geographically. It enjoys a high degree of cultural affinity and has a shared historical legacy.

The economies of South Asian countries are complementary to each other. These are all very positive factors which can contibute to the success of closer economic integration in South Asia. As part of the economic integration, we can certainly consider a free trade area, a regional financial system, customs union and eventually a common currency. After all, not very long ago, our region did have a single currency, the Rupee, in circulation. But that was when we were all part of the British colonial empire. Today, we must aspire to be an Economic Union as sovereign and independent States, based on an acknowledgement of our economic complementarities. Members are aware that a South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) will be inaugurated on January 1, 2006. The SAARC Finance and Economic Ministers have been charged to look into other aspects of economic integration and this also includes harmonization of our fiscal policies, our customs procedures and, at an appropriate time, a common currency as well.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Sir, the Dhaka Summit of the SAARC was marked by a very outstanding development and that was the decision in principle, as the reply to this question says, to admit the People's Republic of China and Japan as Observers. Now, the Minister has just said that they welcome Afghanistan joining the SAARC as a Member. The impression which has gone round, and I would like the Minister or the Prime Minister for that matter, therefore, to clarify on this, that Nepal is the country which sponsored China; they were pressing that China should also join the SAARC as a Member State. But, finally, it was decided that it would only be an observer status and that too alongwith Japan. Now, do we welcome that association of China with the SAARC as an Observer? Or do we have any reservations about China being associated with the SAARC? In the case of Afghanistan, we are saying very openly that we welcome it. What is our position with regard to China? And were we embarrassed because of the fact that it was Nepal which advocated the case of China?

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, we have no reservation in regard to observer status being granted to China as well as to Japan. The question is, one has to specify the obligations and rights which go with the observer status. That will settled at the next Ministerial meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Jethmalani.

SHRI RAM JETHMALANI: Sir, I am all for the kind of efforts which are being made to rehabilitate Afghanistan; and to develop friendly relations with Afghanistan. But, I think, Sir, there is a need to reform and rehabilitate their intellectual and spiritual attitudes as well. Has it ever occurred to anybody in the Government to tell the Afghan Government that we will consider their nation fully civilized and provide all help when they first restore and repair the damaged statues of Buddha which the Taliban vandals had brought down so shamelessly?

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, Afghanistan is going through a very difficult period and the Government and the people of Afghanistan need all our sympathy and support to tide over these difficulties. In my discussions with the President of Afghanistan, I did raise this question and they, the thinking segment of the Afghan public opinion, do recognise that it was very sad that this incident of destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha took place when Taliban was in power.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Chandan Mitra.

DR. CHANDAN MITRA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. I have a very simple question again. Given the state of affairs in Afghanistan, I would like to know from the Government whether there was any great hurry in admitting Afghanistan into SAARC at this stage when the control of the Government in Kabul does not seem to run in large parts of that country. And will the membership on SAARC help the transportation of Indian goods to Afghanistan which Pakistan is still not allowing through the land routes?

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, as regards the transportation of Indian goods using the transit facility in Pakistan, that's a matter we have raised with Pakistan and I know Pakistan, itself has been raising this matter. Therefore, this has no connection with Afghanistan's membership of SAARC. All countries of the SAARC were agreed that it would be good that Afghanistan which has traditionally been part of South Asia did become a member of SAARC.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Karan Singh.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, it's certainly most welcome that after having been cut off as a result of the barbaric Taliban Government for so many years, Afghanistan is once again joining the civilised community of the world and it is welcome that they are coming to SAARC. I have a question. Sir, the South Asia would only be complete SAARC when we have Afghanistan and Burma because it is then only that the geographical

parameters will be complete. Is there any move or has there been any request for Burma's inclusion in SAARC? And if such a request is received, what would be the attitude of the Government of India?

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is no proposal as of now for Myanmar to be a member of SAARC. Myanmar is already a member of the ASEAN. And, therefore, I think, Myanmar's membership of SAARC is a hypothetical issue. With India, Myanmar is also a member of BIMSTEC. And, therefore, there are several opportunities for us to interact with Myanmar in the forum of BIMSTEC.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next Question. Dr. Malaisamy.

Rising number of road accidents

*230. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that country is susceptible to 6 per cent World's road accidents while it has only 1 per cent of world's vehicle populaiton;

(b) what are the major causes for such road accidents; and

(c) what are the preventive and curative measures in existence now and what are the further measures conceived to avert such accidents?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Reliable statistics regarding the road accidents as well as the vehicle population for the world is not available in any source known to the Government. While the number of accidents as reported by the States and UTs in the country is known, the same is not known for the entire world. Similarly, while the number of registered vehicles in the country is being maintained by the Government, the same is not available for the world as a whole. Further, inter-country comparison of accidents and fatalities is also difficult because of different road traffic conditions and different practices followed by the countries in compiling such statistics.

(b) Road accidents are caused by a number of factors such as driver's fault, mechanical defects in the vehicles, fault of pedestrians, bad arods, bad weather etc.